

THE BAILLAD OF READING
GAOL 417

We rubbed the doors, and scrubbed the
floors,
And cleaned the shining rails:
And, rank by rank, we soaped the plank^
And clattered with the pails.
We sewed the sacks, we broke the
stones,
We turned the dusty drill:
We banged the tins, and ba\led the
hyi^ns,
And sweated on the mill:
But in the heart of every man
Terror was lying still.
So still it lay that every day
Crawled like a \weed~clofged wavs.
And we forgot the bitter lot
That waits for fool and knave,
Till once, as we tramped in from work,
We passed an open grave.
With yawning mouth the yellow hole
Gaped for a living thing;
The very mud cried out for blood
To the thirsty asphalte ring:
And we knew that ere one dawn grew
fair
Some prisoner had to swing.
Right in we went, with soul intent
On Death and Dread and Doom:
The hangman, with his little bag,
Went shuffling through the gloom:
And each man trembled as he crept
Into his numbered tomb.
That night the empty corridors
Were full of forms of Fear,
And up and down the iron town
Stole feet we could not hear,
And through the bars that hide the
stars
White faces seemed to peer.
He lay as one who lies and dreams
In a pleasant meadow-land,
The watchers watched him as he slept,
And could not understand
How one could sleep so sweet a sleep
With a hangman close at hand.